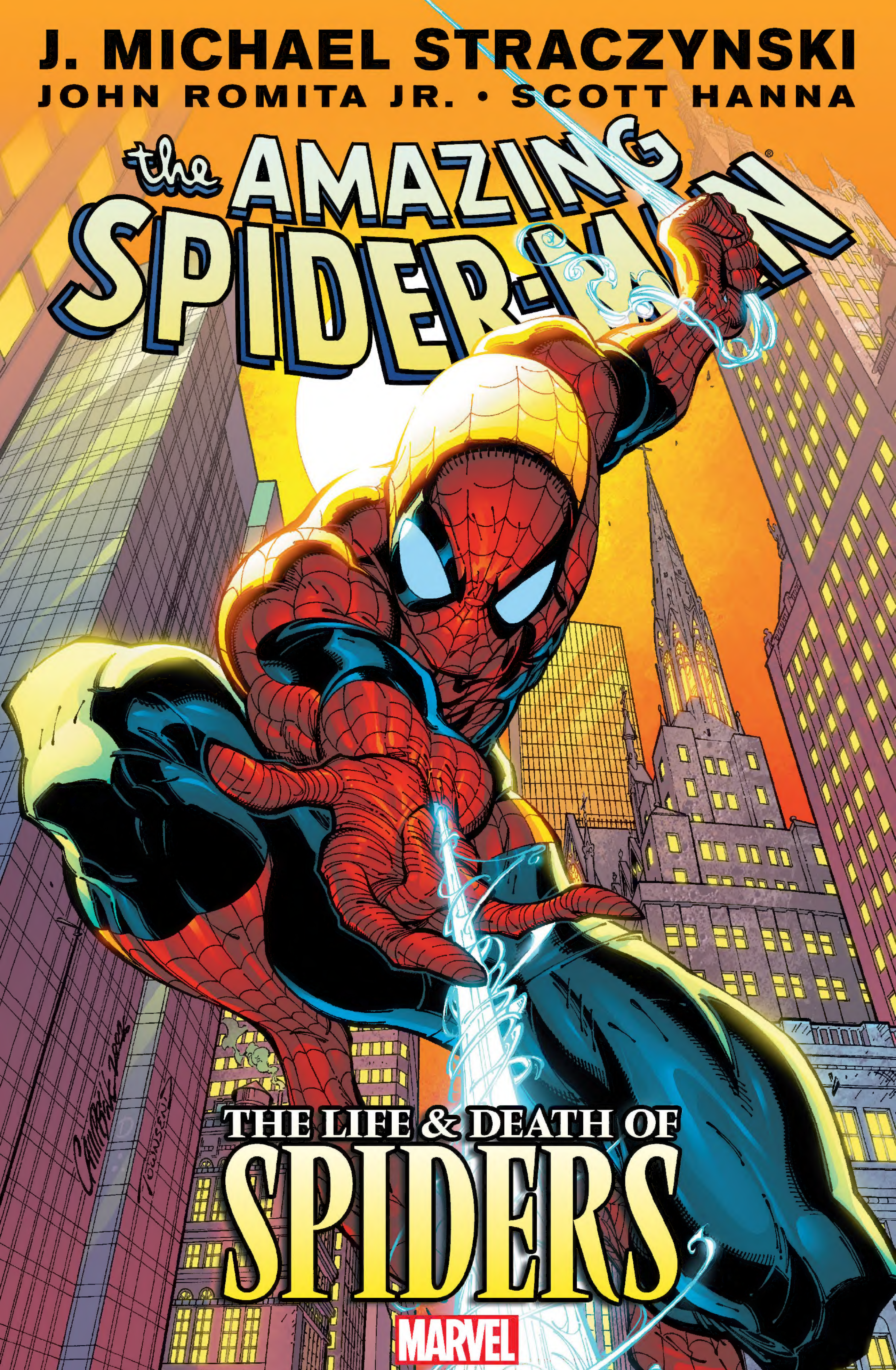
J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

JOHN ROMITA JR. • SCOTT HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

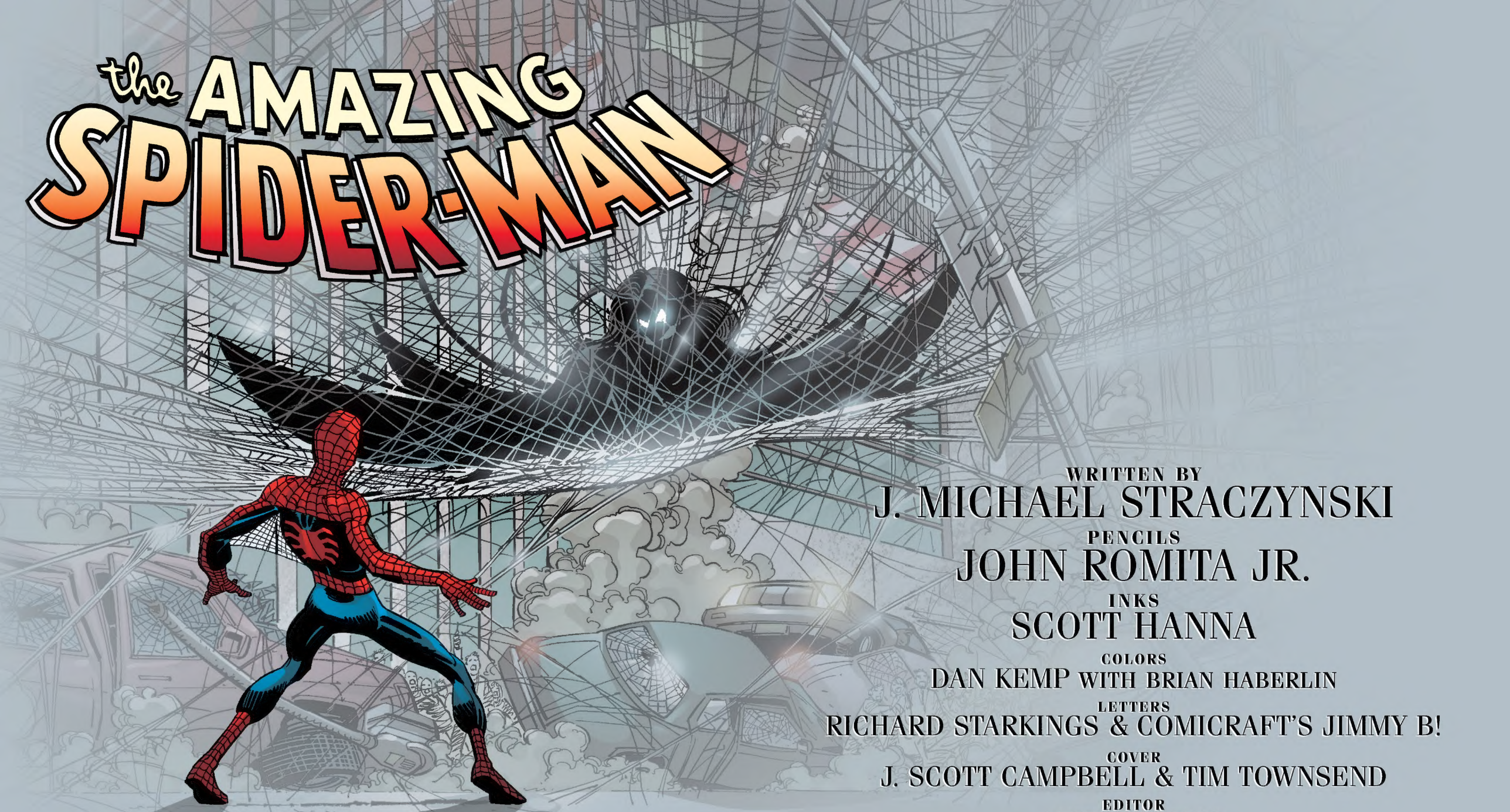


THE LIFE & DEATH OF SPIDERS

MARVEL

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

THE LIFE & DEATH OF SPIDERS



THE LIFE & DEATH OF SPIDERS

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MARVEL
PG 46

STRACZYNSKI
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the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

PUBLIC ENEMA
DAILY BUG
REWA

CHO
D.:

STAN LEE presents:

UNNATURAL ENEMIES

So let's run a summary of the week's work, shall we?

Saw MJ in California but didn't get her back.

Check.

Saw Doc Ock in California, beat the guy who stole his tech, but didn't get Ock himself.

Check.

While I was in California, I forgot to send my check to the telephone company and even though it's just a day late, they've cut off my long distance service.

Again.

YOUR NYT STATEMENT

NYT

Dear Mr. Parker, We regret to inform you.

Sincerely,

New York Tele

URGENT!

While I was in California, I also didn't get around to playing my usual seven numbers in the Lotto. Five bucks, seven numbers, always the same.

The one week I didn't play, my number came up.

$30 MIL. JACKPOT GOES UNCLAIMED

Check.

LOTTO 3134289

BIG WIN 61278

MILLIONAIRES 717

3134289

Don't forget

I look at it all, I look for the common denominator, and I think I've figured out what the problem is.

The problem is California.

Which probably makes me the last guy in the country to finally figure *that* one out.

The only good thing to come out of it is the knowledge that I don't have to drop five bucks a week on the lottery anymore. I mean, what are the odds of hitting the right number *twice?*

Zero. Zip. Zilch. Nada.

11:17

Well, not technically zero, just mathematically insignificant.

I bet I could work out the odds in my head.

11:18

Just got to determine how many seven-number combinations there are, multiplied by the percentage of people who tend to play...

My toenails keep catching on the sheets. I probably should've clipped them before I came to bed.

I suppose I could get up and do it now.

11:35

No, I'll wait until I get up.

Still catching, though.

12:15

...hey-hey, we're the Monkees... people say we monkey around... but we're too busy singing... to put anybody down...

12:30

12:40

What was the name of that fat kid in sixth grade, the one who used to hit me and run away?

Billy Munroe. That's it.

I wonder whatever happened to him.

12:50

Maybe he's in the phone book. Maybe I can call him, ask him to coffee.

Kick the crap out of him.

1:15

...so you better get ready... we may be coming to your towwwwnnnn...

This is ridiculous. I've been laying here for two hours and I still can't get to slee--

--zzzzz zzzz --

"My apologies for forcing the issue, but I could not wait for you to fall asleep normally."

Who's there? I --

DON'T EVER FORGET TO WEAR CLEAN UNDERWEAR

PUMP KEN BOMBS

SHVARTZE KATZE

Ye olde VILLIANS Costume Shoppe

I HATE SPIDEY Specials

365 24-7

I'LL BE BACK

NEVER FORGET

NEVER FORGET

KRAVEN

NEVER FORGE

GO B LYNNE OVERS

MR.

"Just a moment. It took some effort to force sleep on you and ensure you would be able to sustain our conversation through vivid dreaming; I must now concentrate on materializing within your dreamscape."

There. Much better. My first lessons were in dreamwalking, you know; it's good sometimes to return to familiar paths.

Doc Strange? What're you doing here? I mean, if you're gonna show up in the middle of the night, the least you could do is bring in a couple chili dogs and a coke from Gray's Papaya --

I would have come in person, but vital matters elsewhere must take precedence. I came to give you a warning.

Oh.

But first --

What?

Have you noticed a breeze?

As seen in... oh, never mind, just take our word for it. Editor.

A breeze? I... uhm...

Crap!

Better?

Much.

Where did you find the costume?

Over there. The tiger had it.

Excellent. Now, I --

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Wait a minute... I just realized... you saw me without my mask on!

Correct.

But --

It was not a face I recognized. It meant nothing to me.

Yeah, but --

I am a Sorcerer Supreme. If I so desired, I could cause your true name to appear above you in twelve foot tall neon letters.

Also your shoe size, social security number and inseam. But I have no interest in knowing any of those things.

Not even the inseam?

No.

Not even a little?

No.

Now, I know that humor is your way of dealing with things that worry or upset you, but my business here is serious, and we must --

--hmmm --

PTAK STAMPS

Obsessed?

NO.

Of course not.

Why do you ask?

When last we met, I dispatched you to the Astral Plane to deal with the one called Shade. At that time, I instructed you to stay on the path, that you were not to leave the path for any reason.

Listen, about that --

Did you leave the path?

Well, I --

Yeah. A little.

A little...

Do you consider *this* a *little?*

What you are, and what you will be. Depart this plane. ***Now.***

Who are you?

YEEEEOOOOOWWWW!

Okay, so maybe more than a little.

Thing is, it all worked out in the end.

So it may have seemed at the time. But there is a profound difference between ***seems to be*** and ***is.***

I remember the first time I went swimming in the ocean. My father explained that when we were in the city, or on the street in front of our home, the odds were small that we would be attacked by tigers. The ocean was full of unknown dangers gliding just beneath the surface, quick and unpredictable.

"When you enter the ocean, you enter the food chain."

Exactly.

When you went off the path, which kept you safe from prying eyes, you were noticed.

When you went off the path, you entered the food chain.

Whatever the source of your power, you are tied to the spider. It is your icon, your totem, the template for your identity. When you follow the spider, you inherit the ways of the spider. Its natural powers --

--and its natural enemies. They extend into the waking world just as their counterparts in the waking world have echoes in this place.

Yeah, but... what *is* it?

My time is done here... others are calling to me. I must go.

Waitaminnit...

So that you will know this was not simply a dream... there is an etymology book on your third shelf. Look to page seventy-five.

And then...?

Pray.

...pray...

THE WORLD OF BATS

75

Spider Wasp

The spider wasp is the most efficient spider-killer in the insect kingdom. Its sting quickly subdues its prey by paralyzing the spider's central nervous system. But it does not kill the spider all at once. The spider wasp carries its prey to its nest, or if the spider is too large to carry in flight, the wasp simply drags it to the nest. In order to make the spider easier to drag, some spider wasps bite off the spider's legs, often drinking the blood that leaks from the wounds. The spider wasp places a single spider in each nest, which is often constructed after catching the prey.

Hey, God? It's Peter again.

"Listen, not that I'm complaining or anything, but next incarnation, just for a change of pace, you think you could have me get bitten by a radioactive Jennifer Lopez?

"Just a thought."

EXCELL AUTO

Cans, bottles, plastic? Hmmm? Caaaans, Bottttles, plaaaastic?

Cans? Bottles? Plastic?

Cans? Bottles? Pla --

KA THOOOM

...plastic...?

...ohjeez...

...ahh ...ahh... ahhhhh...

AAAAAHHH!

It's been three days since the dream, and I'm starting to think that's all it was, just a dream.

I mean, yeah, that page was pretty ominous, but I've gone through that book a hundred times.

It's altogether possible that my subconscious remembered the page number and the photo. I've had a lot of free-floating anxiety lately, and my imagination may have been looking for something to give form to that anxiety.

Listen to me, I'm starting to sound like a shrink. Say, now that's an idea. Peter Parker, Psychotherapist to Super-Arch-Villains.

"So, Doctor Doom, do you think that your name may have had something to do with your depressive personality, or did you have a --"

What the --

Okay, no fair trying to sneak up on --

--a guy...

Little one.

Little spider.

So far from home. So far from your mother.

Shathra smelled you on the other side. Followed the scent across the darkness.

Little one.

Little spider.

Look, I know why you're here, but there's no reason for us to fight. I don't buy into this whole *"natural enemies"* thing... people have choices, they have free will --

Shathra not people.

Okay, well, yeah, there is that --

Shathra not fight.

There, you see? It's --

To fight needs two of equal power.

With you, Shathra play. Until she is bored.

Then Shathra gives you to her children.

Sorry, not interested.

FWIP

I've got places to go, things to do, credit cards to overcharge --

No. Stay.

Whoa!

Okay, now --

--you're starting --

--to annoy me.

Look, I think I see the problem here. You're one big ball of instincts, and you have to follow them. I get that. But that doesn't mean we have to --

Talks too much.

Aggh!

Damn... she's fast. I barely saw that coming in time to move. Would've lost the whole shoulder.

Okay, I tried. But if that's the way you want it --

--you *got* it.

All my life, I've had a thing about hitting women. I won't do it. Even with a baddie. Unless I'm totally up against the wall.

Then as she moves again, impossibly fast, I remind myself that she's *not* human... and that unless I end this fast and hard, against the wall is exactly where I'll end up.

You know what your problem is? I wear a spider costume because it's a nod to where the power came from.

It's a role. But there's a difference between wearing the colors and *playing* the part --

WHAM

ZZSHHAAA--

--and letting yourself get *buried* in the part.

I decide to make tracks while I can. I don't know if she can really track me the way she says --

--but it's worth testing the hypothesis, just in case.

...play...

I head uptown, into the noise and the traffic. Buying time. I've been at this long enough to know that going toe-to-toe against someone you've just met is stupid, unless there are lives at stake.

Then it's still stupid, but necessary.

Need to get a sense of what her abilities are, how fast she can --

Oh. *That* fast.

Nuts.

Whoof---

ARRIVE AT
BRAIN

Look! It's a bird!

It's a plane!

It's --

Move it, ya freaks, the light ain't gettin' any greener!

SIRICO'S PIZZA

KER RASSSH

Oh, man, that one hurt... this is such a --

Come *on*... could *some*one cut me just a *little* slack here?

Yeah, fine, up yours too, buddy.

On the other hand, maybe it's a good thing --

--because *now* I'm pissed.

KRACCK

Okay, you want this, let's do it. But we'll do it *my* way.

Welcome to the subway system. Welcome to New York. Welcome to *my* town.

Hey! Yo! You gotta pay!

Sorry, all my change is in my other pair of pants.

Coming through!

Made it! Now if only she --

Perfect.

Little spider thought it could hide. But Shathra sees it, Shathra knows it, knows *all* about it, because she can ***smell*** it, she can --

Hey, Shathra --

BRAAAAPPP

NJ JETS

It should be a moment to relax. To celebrate. Except --

--before the car hit, she was smiling. And I heard her say, just loud enough for me to hear it --

"...she can smell... Parker..."

I get off two stops down. I could ride it to the end of the line, put that much more distance between us, but I don't know if it'll make much difference.

Metrocard Vending Machines

1 2 3 4 5 st. station Downtown A C E

Not if she can find me any time she wants.

Not if she knows.

I head back to the apartment, but I stay in costume for hours, waiting.

I'm still waiting when the sun comes up, and I know I have to go to school, tired or not.

I'm under no illusions that the subway car would've done anything more than slow her down. But if that's so... then where is she?

Is this a stand-up fight? Or is she playing cat and mouse?

And what is she going to do now that she knows? Doc Strange said he could use sorcery to pull out my real name... she's from the other side, maybe that's how she got it.

Damn, I'm tired.

Why can't things be simple anymore? Why does everything have to get harder? I was just minding my own business, I wasn't bothering anybody, just like --

--just like when I met you guys.

Uncle Ben told me that with great power comes great responsibility.

But what comes with great responsibility?

Other than the need for the world's longest nap right about now.

She's the wasp to my spider. But am I really a spider? I know I've got the wardrobe, I've got the look, I've got the powers --

But am I *really* one of you?

And is that really such a swell thing, to be a spider? Because nobody even *likes* spiders.

Well, sure, there was Renfield, but he doesn't count.

I always took that part of my life for granted, 'cause it was a cool style, a look guaranteed to strike terror into crooks, because they are a cowardly and --

--whatever --

Point is, I never went too deep into the whole spider thing.

Never went much further than the name. But lately the spider part of me seems to be drawing a lot of attention from outside forces. Ezekiel. Morlun. Now Shathra.

I think... that I need to do some more thinking.

So if you're listening, "Mom," you've got some serious explaining to do here!

SLAMM

I just wish I knew what she was up to, right now. Because I don't think I'm going to like it much.

New kind of play now... new kind of play...

I'm sorry, what did you say your name was again?

Sha -- that is, Sharon.

Yes.

And you say you know Spider-Man?

We were lovers.

He has many strange sexual habits.

Would you like me to tell you all about it for your newspaper?

MARVEL

PG 47

STRACZYNSKI

ROMITA JR

HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

STAN LEE presents:

The Life & Death of Spiders

Okay, Joey, time's up.

PS 108

How's it look?

Not enough tannic acid.

It's turning green. Is it supposed to turn green?

Right.

You sure you don't mind staying late to help me with my science project, Mr. Parker?

No, of course not. Why do you ask?

Well, it's just... you keep looking out the window like you're expecting somebody.

No... no, I'm not expecting anyone, Joey. You have my full and complete attention.

Where is she? I know Shathra's out there. If she knows who I am then it's almost certain that she knows where to find me.

She's waiting. Why?

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She followed me all the way from the Astral Plane, where she picked up my scent and came after me, the wasp to my spider, natural enemies. I can't believe she'd stop now, not after we went toe-to-toe across town.

I've met some bad-news guys in my time, but everything in me, every spider-sense I've got, was screaming that this one's bad straight through.

Malicious. Mean. Spiteful. Twisted. I think she enjoys doing this, enjoys tearing her prey apart.

One way or another.

Had to come to class, because I can't turn my back on the kids like Joey, so much like me at that age. But I've been looking over my shoulder every two minutes.

Waiting. Because no way is this over yet.

So?

It's amber now.

Then the solution is officially a stable medium. Congratulations.

Yaaaayyy! I got a stable medium!

Which, let me tell you, in an age of psychic hotlines, isn't easy.

So you're sure you turned off the Bunsen burners?

Totally.

Because if the school burns down, they're almost certainly going to take it out of my paycheck.

You can handle it.

Okay, I'm going back --

No, really, it's off.

EXIT

Anyway, I gotta go or my mom'll have a cat. Thanks again, Mr. Parker.

It's okay, Joey. You have a lot of potential. I want to make sure that potential has the chance to be realized.

See you in class Monday.

When I was in high school, I was just like him, the odd man out. If my teachers hadn't taken the time to see something of value in me, and encourage me in science and photography, who knows where I would've ended up. It's such a pivotal time.

I just hope I can do the same.

Hey, Parker, you still here?

Yeah, Kyle, just helping one of my students with a chemistry experiment.

Well, it must've gone okay since the school didn't blow up.

FACULTY LOUNGE

Some of us are putting together a field trip to the Museum of Natural History next month, you want in, Peter?

Sure.

--so when did the two of you first get together?

It was two, almost three years ago that I became Spider-Man's lover.

What?!

Didn't you hear? She's been on the *TV* all day, talking about how she and Spider-Man have been an item. The story just got picked up by *CNN.*

LIVE

FOX NEWS

He has... well, I suppose the term would be an insatiable appetite for sex.

But that's often the case with men who are trying to compensate for something.

It's her. I can feel it. I can hear it in her voice.

Not Sharon. Shathra.

Where I became disillusioned, and when I decided to go public, was when I realized that so many of his so-called battles were staged for publicity, and that he was receiving kickbacks from some of the companies whose buildings were damaged during his fights.

LIVE

Sharon Keller: Caught In A Web Of Love

FOX NEWS

FOXFACT: SPIDERMAN IS WANTED BY NYPD

LIVE
FOX NEWS
SHARON KELLER
IN LADEN SPOTTED IN PARIS
He'd make it look bad, and the owners would put in for far more damage than the fight really caused, in exchange for a percentage of the insurance settlement.
He used to spend the money like it was water. We'd go to clubs and... well, as I said, he always was... what's the word?
Kinky.
God... God... GodGodGodGod...
I think I'm going to be sick.
DAILY
TYCO CHIL
So what else can you tell us about Spider-Man?
Oh, well, where do I start? He talked a lot about the people he worked with sometimes --
--how they were freaks even by his standards. He used to laugh at them all the time behind their backs.
I don't believe it. Not one word of it.
The price of celebrity.
FOX NEWS
HT IN A WEB OF LOVE
It's a very different sort of world, I can tell you that much. I don't know how his wife puts up with it.
He has a wife?
Well, sure, of course he has a wife.
BRRRRPPP
BRRRRPPP

Don't they all?

LI

Pick up the phone, MJ... pick up the phone...

I guess right now the question on everyone's mind is... why are you coming forward now? And why should anyone believe your claims?

Well, on the first question, I guess the most honest answer is... I just got tired of the hypocrisy.

LIV

I got tired of someone pretending to be something he's not: a decent, honorable guy. The people who think he's some kind of hero need to hear the other side.

And isn't there always another side? Isn't that what the news has taught us about everyone... politicians, clergy, teachers... everyone?

See? It's what I've been telling you for years. Someone find this woman fast, I don't want us to drag our feet on this one.

LIVE

As for why you should believe me, well, if anything I'm saying is a lie, let him just come out and say so. He can say what he has to say...

LIVE

FOX NEWS

FACT: SPIDERS CAN LIFT 20X THEIR OWN WEIGHT

AND MISSING AT WTC - 2081 - NEVER

DOW △301

...and I'll say what I have to say about him. Who he is, the kind of person he is. But he won't. And you want to know why he won't?

LIVE

Because I'm telling the truth.

CLICK

MJ?

--hkkkhhh--

MJ? MJ, it's me --

God, Peter...

Listen to me --

I just want to know one thing, Peter. Is it true?

Is it?

No... no, it's not, MJ. I swear.

Then why aren't you out there? Why are you letting her say these terrible things? Why don't you stop her?

I can't, MJ, I --

She knows who I am.

Peter... how does this woman know who you are?

I... it's a long story. Look, I can't talk right now --

Then why did you --

Because you have to know --

--that it's not true. And I'm going to take care of it. One way or another. But it's not true, MJ.

I swear it. I swear it. I --

CLICK

You know, they just don't make things to last anymore...

So we'll definitely be following this story as it develops.

LIVE

FOX NEWS

WEB OF LOVE

NEW - 2801 DEAD OR MISSING AT WTC

DOW Δ 340

That we will, Susi. Looks like another role model, for some at least, bites the dust.

In other news --

--a couple in Vancouver, British Columbia claim to have bred the world's first singing cat.

Our correspondent reports --

SHRKTT

I've been away too long.

It's started.

I'm so angry I can't even see. I web my way across the city on instinct and rage.

I know where the studio is. I know where she is.

I try to form a coherent thought. I can't.

So I say the hell with it and give it over to the rage.

Let it burn.

Let it burn.

She's going down.

So what can you tell us about Spider-Man that the general public doesn't know?

You mean like who he is?

That would be a start.

Well, I suppose I *could,* but it's a little early in the game for that, don't you think?

Do you consider this a game?

Isn't everything? Not that it really means anything to me one way or another.

So you're prepared to tell us the name of the man behind the mask?

Prepared? Oh, I'm prepared for anything and everything. You have to be. Though I don't know about the *"man behind the mask."* I mean, he's really more insect than man.

He just doesn't realize it yet.

But he's about to.

I don't under --

CRASH

That's enough!

Aaaaahhh!

My reputation is one of the only things in the world that ***means*** anything to me. You can't beat me so you try to hurt me another way.

Security!

I won't have it. Tell them it's a lie. Tell them you're a sick, twisted, perverse --

Back away!

Oooff!

Tell them.

Tell... them!

Damn you, *tell them the truth!*

FOX BREAKING NEWS

Tell them the truth? Sure.

I'd be happy to.

Pet --

Stop it!

...ohmygod...

10:55

To our viewers... you have just seen a man out of control... a super-powered man, a so-called hero, striking an unarmed, defenseless woman, a --

FOX

BREAKING NEWS

--a... er... ummm...

Oh my...

Little man.

Little spider.

Not ready to play before. Not fun to fight before.

Little man. Little spider.

Now he is ready to play.

She hits me. Hard.

I don't even feel it.

All I want is to rip her limbs off and beat her with them.

Ummm... we'll be right back... after these words from our sponsor.

I hit her with everything I've got. I'm not holding back anymore.

She did worse than hit me. She hurt me in the deepest part of myself. My self-respect. My heart.

Listening to her, I wanted to be sick. Or take a bath.

Now as the rage fills me so that I'm half blind with fury, I want only one thing.

I want to kill her. For the first time in my life, I want to kill something. Because that's what she is. A thing. Inhuman. Monstrous.

I want to grind her bones to powder with my bare hands. Fighting on sheer instinct. Not thinking, just fighting.

And it feels good. It feels --

Aaaaghhh!

Shush -- don't let him hear you!

Aaaaahhhh! Monster! Monster, Mommy, monster!

What's he pointing at me for? I'm not the monster, I --

...ohmygod... what have I done? What was I thinking?

I wasn't thinking. I was acting on instinct. It's as if I --

Little man gone.

Only spider now.

Shathra sent the man away.

Now Shathra and little spider are just what they are, and nothing they are not.

Now little spider is ripe.

She wanted me angry. She wanted me to lose control. Wanted me to be like her.

Spider to her wasp.

Natural enemies.

Pure and unambiguous.

Because what mother feeds impure food to her children?

I'm still running on instinct; have to get out of here, clear my head.

Worry about cleaning up the mess later, when I --

Hssssss--

Aaaaahhhh!

Damn it... feeling when I should have been thinking... back's on fire, spreading --

Every nerve on fire... some kind of stinger with a paralyzing agent... come on, Peter, keep moving.

Got to get out of here... she's closing... enjoying the hunt...

Hey, watch it, where d'ya think you're --

SHUNK

SHUNK

Drive.

Wh... where?

Anywhere.

Okay, uptown it is.

Spider running. Come play, little spider. Come and --

--play.

Hey, you know, I had that other guy in my cab the other day, whathisname, Ben something-or-other, you know --

The Thing.

Feeling sick. Don't throw up, don't throw up --

Most heroes, I gotta tell you, they're lousy tippers, you know? Think they're doing you a favor, saving you from that Magnet-guy, or that real nutcase, Galactaid, whatever the hell his name is --

--can't control my hands, can't get my mask off... if I throw up in my mask I drown --

I mean, sure, it's great for them, it's a job, right? But for a working stiff just pulling down a few bucks hacking a cab, it don't mean much if you're a crummy tipper, am I right?

Reed Richards, nice guy, good tipper, twenty percent, every time. All the guys love him.

We call him Stretch. Funny, right? *Stretch,* get it?

Worst tipper ever, this guy got into my cab years ago, all covered in water, wings on his feet if you can believe that. Tried to pay me in seashells. A real nut, y'know?

I think he was maybe a foreigner, not from around here, so maybe that's it, people got funny ways, y'know?

Let me out... have to get out --

Here? Sure thing, chief. Just let me pull over. Cops in this part of town'll give you a ticket for blinking funny --

No... have to get out... *now!*

Hey! That's five-fifty! *Hey!*

Muscles are freezing up... from the paralyzing sting... if I don't keep moving they'll lock up.

Hey, you see that!? Spider-guy over there stiffed me on a fare!

You're freakin' kidding!

Do I freakin' look like I'm freakin' kidding?

Okay, Okay --

"--I believe you. Fits though, y'know? I was watching TV and they were saying he's kinda weird..."

As I try to keep moving, I remember a documentary I once saw in high school on insects. How every insect feeds on every other insect.

I remember watching a spider-wasp sting a spider, and follow it until the paralysis stopped it dead in its tracks. And I thought how awful, knowing you were dead, but you weren't dead yet.

I told myself it's just the way it is in the insect kingdom. Everything feeds on everything else. It's just nature's way.

I don't want to die. Not like this.

STORAGE

Not like an insect. Trapped. Waiting to die.

--and the hat guy says to the kangaroo, *"We don't serve food here! This is a hat store! Can't you read?"*

And the kangaroo says, *"Listen, if I could read, I would've asked for a menu!"*

--snicker! --

Head's getting fuzzy from the sting. I think about people joking while insects die all around them, not even aware of the war going on under their feet, in the walls.

My fingers are numb. I can't feel my face anymore.

I keep crawling on instinct.

Insect instinct.

Can't keep my eyes open. Can't crawl any further. Just want to sleep. I feel myself letting go of my body.

End of the road. End of the web. End of the --

DECEMBER IS ARACHNA-MANIA MONTH!

THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTS:

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SPIDERS!

MARVEL
PG 48

STRACZYNSKI
ROMITA JR
HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

C40
2002

DECEMBER IS ARACHNA-MANIA MONTH!

THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTS:

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SPIDERS!

--so that even though spiders, in the main, tend to nest in colonies, they remain independent in their hunting techniques.

There are some places in South and Central America where the spider colonies are so thick that the webs hang like curtains, one on top of the other, as far as the eye can see.

But unlike bees or wasps, where if you attack one the whole colony will come after you in revenge, if a spider falls, he falls alone.

Now, if you'll all come this way, we'll stop at the cafeteria so that teacher can get something with sugar and caffeine --

There's somebody *in* there.

Yes, of course there is.

But --

We don't have all day, now come along.

No, really, there is. How come nobody ever believes me...

I've found him.

Get the helicopter ready.

Let me tell you about the first Spider-Man...

A SPIDER'S TALE

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His name was Kwaku Anansi, and centuries ago he lived in the West African country now called Ghana.

They said he sometimes looked like a wise old man.

Other times, they said, he looked more like a spider, and traveled across Africa on strong web strings. Learning the ways of distant people.

Soon he had seen all there was to see, had traveled the land from shore to shore, and climbed and webbed his way to the highest point. But he yearned to see more, to learn more, to see past the horizon, to the world beyond the one he knew.

So he resolved to climb beyond where any had gone before, into the sky itself, where Nyame, the sky-god, lived, because Nyame was the keeper of all the stories of the world, past, present, and future.

He climbed higher than any man had climbed before.

He climbed for longer than there are words to describe it.

He climbed until he disappeared, passing beyond the edge of the mortal world.

When he reached the end of his journey, Anansi asked the sky-god for his stories and his wisdom of the mortal world and the world beyond. And Nyame said --

My stories and my wisdom come with a fearful cost, little spider. What price are you prepared to pay?

And Anansi said --

There is no price too high, no price I will not pay.

Will you serve my cause throughout time?

I will.

Will you capture with your web those I ask you to capture?

I will.

Will you turn your face only toward me, forsaking all those you knew before?

And Anansi hesitated...

I cannot abandon those who turned to me in need, those I love, those I revere.

And Nyame said --

The price is sufficient.

Enter then into my secrets, and know my stories.

And with that, Anansi passed forever from the eyes of the waking world.

But his knowledge was passed to his children, who spun his story, and the stories he learned from the sky-god, into webs of their own.

From that day until this, the webs of spiders tell stories learned from Nyame, stories of the world we know and the world beyond, stories of what is, what was, and what is yet to be.

The stories are all around us, for those who know how to read them.

While Anansi, who was both spider and man, became ever more the spider in his service to the sky-god, both father and mother to the spiders of the world. Where they walk, he walks, and through their eyes, he sees the world he left behind.

So there is little he does not see.

And less still that happens by accident.

For while the spider's gifts can be stolen, borrowed, or impersonated --

--only once were they given freely. In the intersection between science and the spider.

Science allowed it to happen. But science is new, and the spider is old.

The science was random.

The placement, in a room filled with possibilities, deliberate.

There is no contradiction. You are a child of the spider and a child of science.

You are the product of neutrons and photons, of the dance of DNA and radiation, intertwining and exchanging information and intentions.

But your voice is the voice of the spider, a voice that is older than humankind itself --

--and to acknowledge the one is to acknowledge the other.

...Ezekiel... I was right...

...you're alive...

And so are you. But just barely. You're lucky. Toward the end, you were operating on sheer instinct, and that brought you to the spider exhibit. She lost your scent among so many other spiders.

What did she hit me with?

You were stung with a paralyzing agent. It was meant to immobilize you, not kill you. At least, not at first. A second sting, however, would have been enough to paralyze your lungs, leading to suffocation and --

Okay, thanks, I think that covers it...

I should get going... she's still out there, she'll be coming for me --

You can't be sure of that.

Not for a while.

Yes, I can. I took the liberty of... moving you.

Moving me? Where did you --

No --

--freaking --

--way.

Welcome to Ghana, Peter.

Amazing what a corporate jet, five lobbyists, and a couple of government contracts can do these days, isn't it?

Don't worry, they don't recognize the costume --

Uniform.

--and they sure as hell wouldn't recognize you. They're members of the Ashanti tribe, who first told the story of Kwaku Anansi, and their loyalties are to that history.

Then it wasn't a dream...

Hell, no. I just got bored sitting around waiting for you to wake up. Had to entertain myself somehow. And if you remembered any of it, all the better.

I bought this patch of land about nine, ten years ago, when I first began tracking down the ruins.

What ruins?

Hi, how you doing? They sure are friendly here.

They're waving goodbye. Very few who come to the ruins survive the experience.

You couldn't have left that part out? I was actually feeling a bit better.

So like I said... what ruins?

An archaeologist friend tipped me off to them after he found the first one in Central America. The same exact iconograpy appears in all six, and they all tell the story of Kwaku Anansi, though sometimes the names vary.

Take a look... and tell me it doesn't take your breath away.

...whoa.

What was that?

Thank you, Keanu Reeves.

Skip it.

This is a place of power. It can serve you.

"As the first one we found in Central America served me, once, a long time ago."

Look, this is great and all, and I'm glad you saved my life, don't misunderstand me...

But I still don't entirely buy the idea that there's some kind of connection between what happened to me and... all this.

Let me get this straight. You run around with Thunder Gods, Sorcerers Supreme, aliens, ghosts, demons, guys who turned to sand and immortals with cosmic powers... and you don't believe in *this?*

Okay, point taken, but --

Even if you don't believe it had anything to do with the incident that gave you your abilities, there *is* a power to this place, and to this story. It's there for the taking.

Consider it like having an eccentric uncle who visits from time to time and gives you a quarter each time. Maybe he's nuts, but that doesn't mean you can't spend the money.

Okay, so this place can protect me from Shathra?

Not exactly.

Will it make it harder for her to find me?

"Not exactly. If anything your presence here is bringing her to you faster than she could find you on her own."

So it won't protect me from the one who's trying to kill me, and actually makes it easier for her to find me.

Check.

Any way I can get a cab this far out of town?

I don't deny it will bring her here quickly, Peter. She is very likely almost here.

"The difference is, she will arrive... worried."

Because in this place, you are not alone. In this place, you are more purely what you are.

The spider to her wasp. But not irrational, the way she wanted you when she called you out to fight.

Focused. Primal. Deadly.

Be the spider. But be smart about it.

She's coming.

Swell.

Stand your ground. Feel the strength of this place. Feel the age of it. You are part of something greater than yourself.

Let the part of you that is greater and stronger and wiser than her defeat the part of her that is like every other creature in the world.

The part that is afraid of spiders.

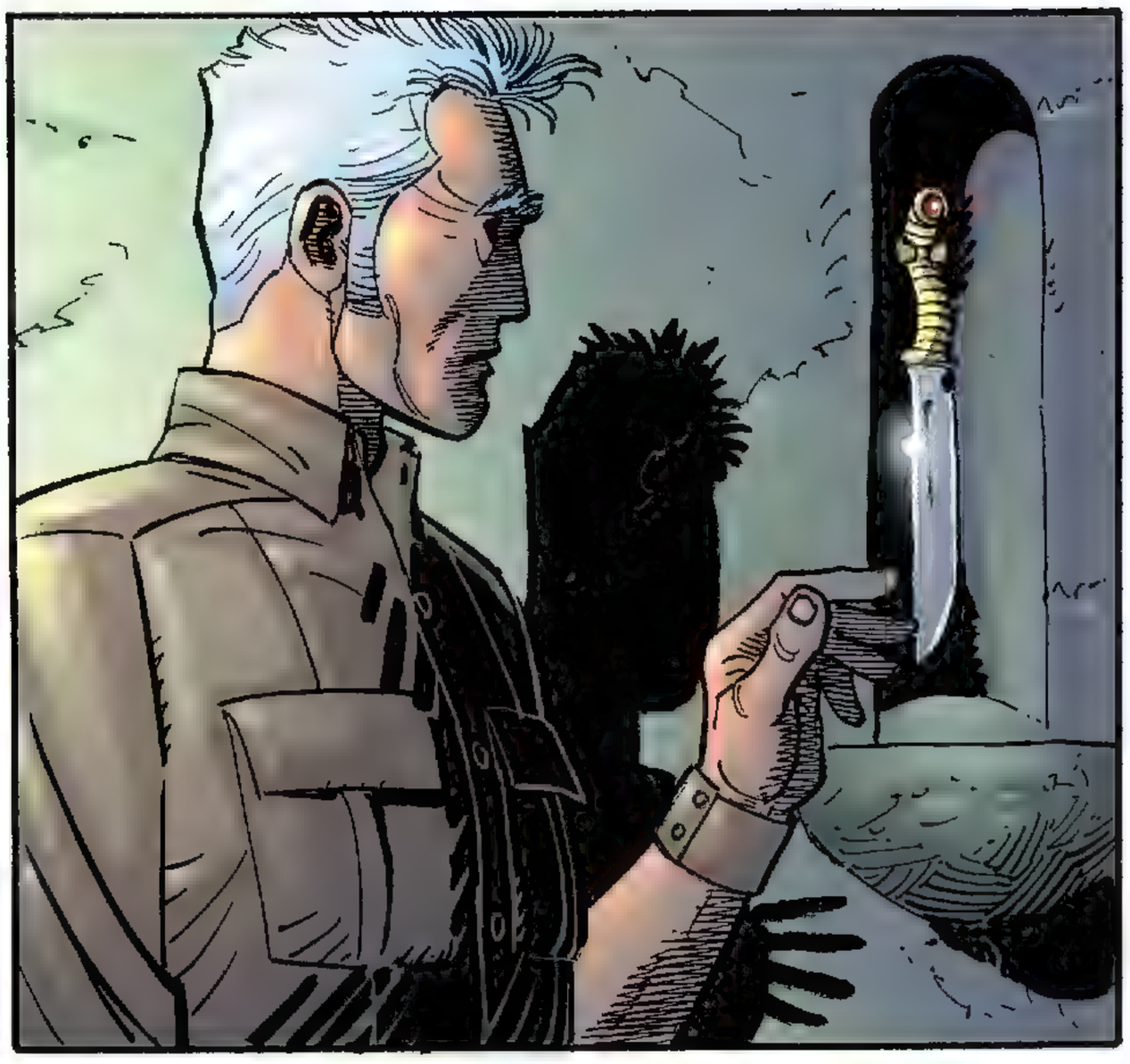
Yeah? And where are you going to be during all this?

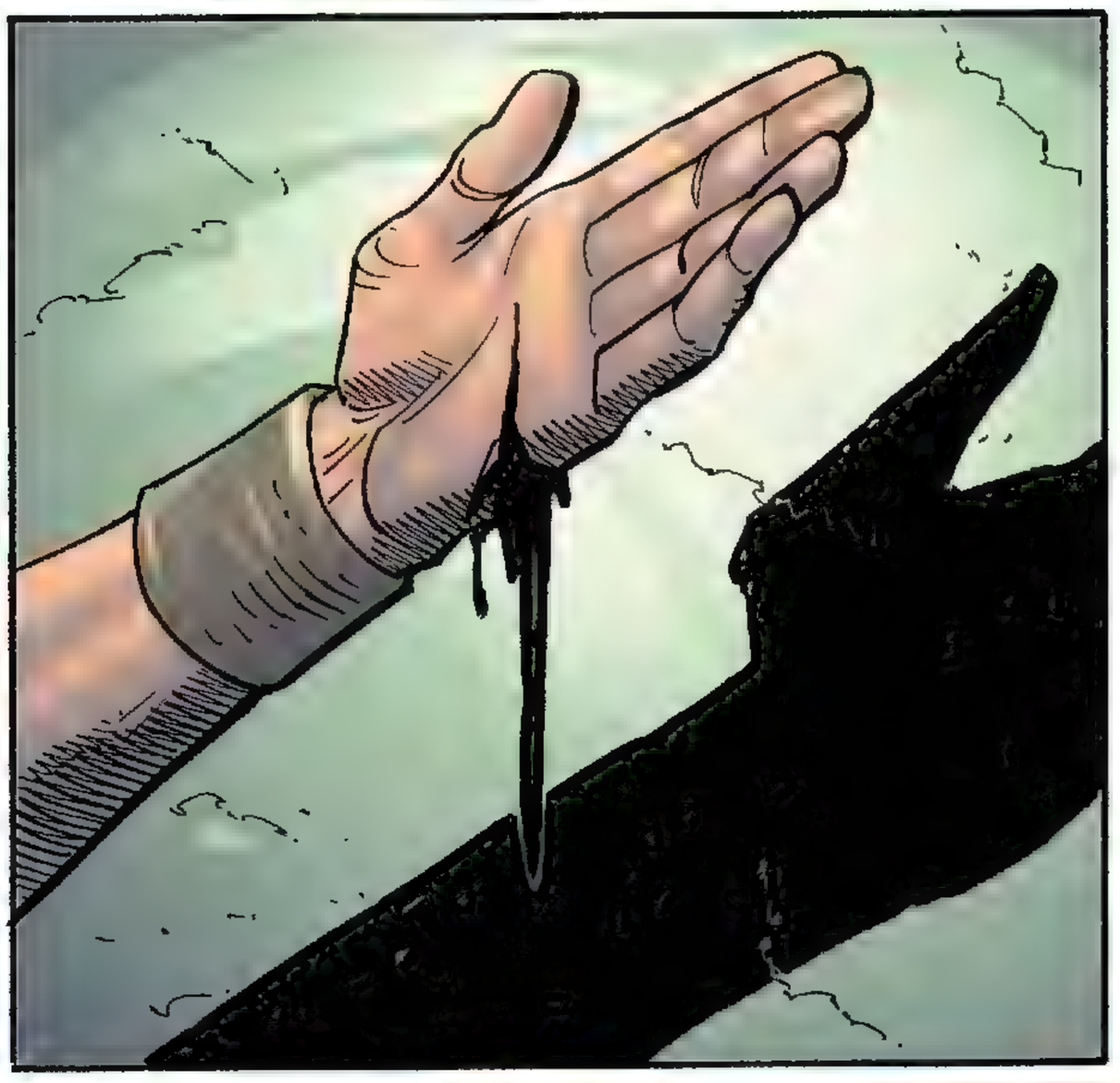
In a place where you cannot go.

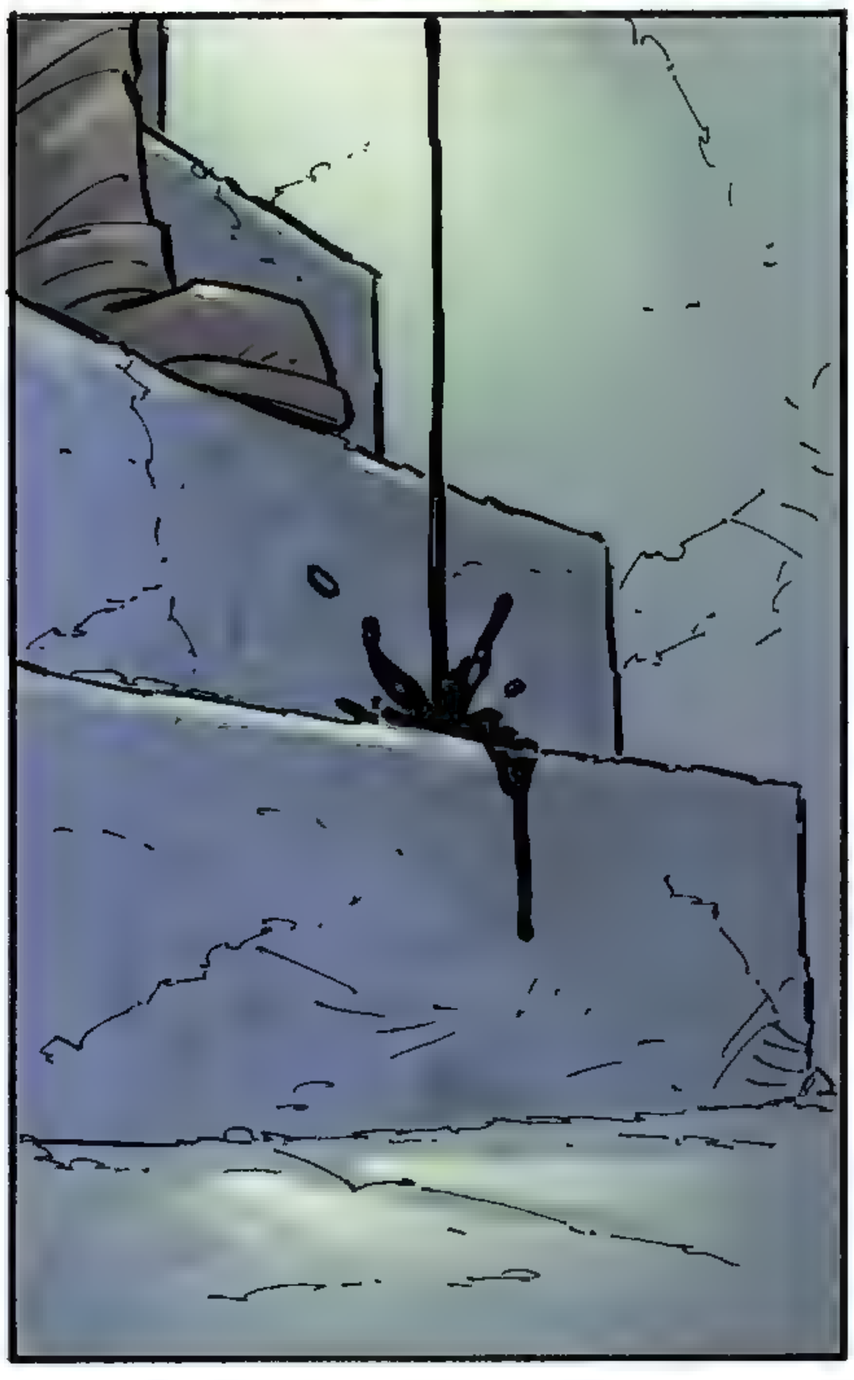
Good luck.

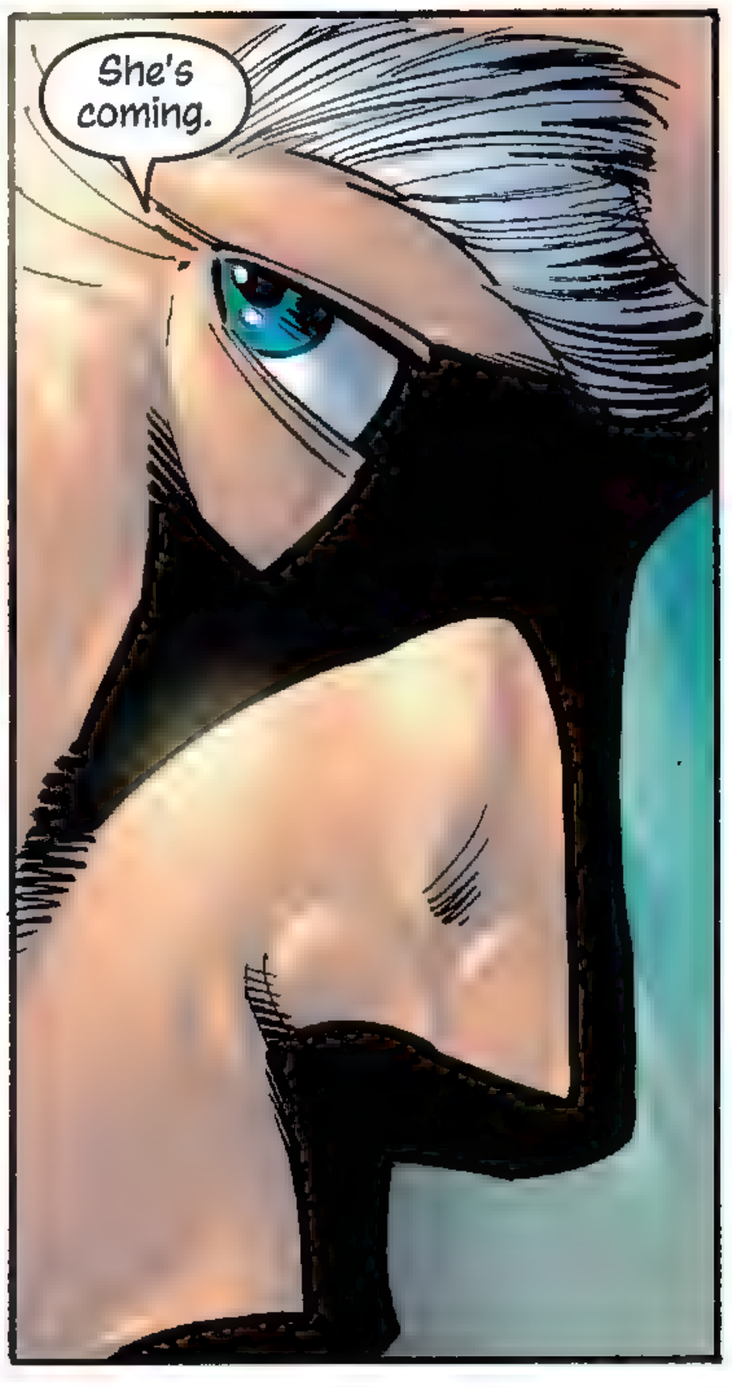
Thanks bunches.

Never a Schwarzenegger around when you need one...








She's coming.

She's coming.

I can feel her.

Stand your ground, he said.

I fight the urge to run.

Instead, I find myself becoming calm, the calm of knowing that in the insect kingdom, you don't pick your fights. You don't just decide not to fight. When the predator comes knocking at your hidey-hole, you come out fighting.

Little spider...

Or you die.

Time to die now.

And I decide that if I have to live like a spider or die like a man --

Then I'll be the spider I always knew was there.

Once and for all.

Come what may.

Normally I'd be making wisecracks right now.

But I don't.

I remember the grief she caused not just me, but MJ.

I remember the pain in her voice, the injustice of what was done, the inhumanity.

She struck out at the man to bring out the spider.

Be careful what you wish for.

Have to stay focused. Stay in the moment.

Stay the spider.

Zzshhhaaa!

No words.

No hesitation.

Just the knowledge that one of us isn't walking away from this.

Little spider... little man... does not understand...

Shathra does not tire, does not stop. Shathra can play with the spider forever.

But sooner or later, the man in the spider has to sleep.

Then Shathra will take the spider. Take the man. Take everyone and everything he has ever loved.

We are natural enemies.

I will never go away.

Will the spider play... until death?

Yes.

You said one of us would not walk out of here. Did you mean it, Peter?

To protect MJ and May, are you ready to go all the way? No matter what? Even if it means killing it?

Her?

God help me, but I am. I am.

God help me... god help me...

...irrrr?

Na... na...

Aaaahh...

!!!!AAAHHH!

!!!!AAAHHH!

Yaaaaa... stop... stopppp!

I was ready to --

I didn't finish it.

I know.

Yes, you did. You did what had to be done. Your blood called to her, brought her here. You built the trap. Spun the web. Stunned and weakened her. The rest --

--belongs to the spider.

No... no... please, mercy --

And spiders don't understand mercy.

AAAAYYYYYIIIIIII!

What's down there, Ezekiel?

You don't want to --

I need to know if she's going to come after me again. What's down there?

The food chain goes both ways, you know.

You got a problem with that?

No.

She's not human. Not really alive. I keep telling it to myself, over and over. In the hope that one day I'll believe it.

And the knowledge that I probably never will.

I don't know which is better, and which is worse. Which is me --

--and which is the spider.

"So it's been quite a news day for everyone, Beth."

It sure has been. As our viewers know, the news media was the victim of a hoax concerning the individual known as Spider-Man.

FOX NEWS

Apparently the information given about his reputation was far from credible, as demonstrated by these before and after pictures of the source in question.

It's always hard to do a story when you're not sure who, or what, you're really talking to, isn't it, Beth?

It sure is, Dave.

And of course it's pretty much impossible to sue for libel because Spider-Man would have to go into court to prove who he is, and that he suffered damages, and well, that's not exactly going to happen.

So everybody catches a break and everybody wins in the end.

You bet. Now, on to the weather --

--as local LA viewers have noticed by now it's starting to come down pretty vigorously out there.

Yes, hello, I'd like to order a cab.

Where to?

One thing's for certain, Beth --

The airport, please.

AA

LOS ANGELES TO JFK AIRPORT, NEW YORK

MARYJANE PARKER

DAY OF ISSUE

ITINERARY

AA

--there's one heck of a storm coming.

MARY JANE PARKER

FIRST CLASS

MARVEL
PG 49

STRACZYNSKI
ROMITA JR
HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

Okay, I know you don't want to hear this but pay attention, *deal* with it, because this is important.

I know you're scientifically inclined, and I know you don't want to believe that your powers are in any way totemistic in nature or orgin. I get that.

But the paranormal or the unexplained is in every aspect of life. Church, physics, metaphysics, crop circles, Thunder Gods, Sorcerers Supreme, out of body experiences, extra-dimensional travel, the soul, art, music, Gaia, big green -- sometimes gray -- guys who should've died in gamma bomb bursts but just got real strong instead.

You can't isolate yourself from the whole world, and say none of it has anything to do with you just because that's the way you want it.

Maybe the spider that bit you was intended for you and you alone, maybe it was sent, maybe it was operating in a larger context. That's a connection going in to something more, something bigger.

Maybe the spider had nothing behind it at all, no meaning, no intent, no context, it just webbed its way into the wrong place at the wrong time. But that scientific event tapped into ideas and constructs and racial memories and powers that were here long before science showed up.

The Ashanti have stories of a Spider-Man that go back centuries. You could look it up. You can't deny that, it's an historical fact, it--

A historical fact.

What?

It's *An* if you can't hear the H, it's *A* if you can. *An* hour, *A* horse. It's a common mistake made by people who want to impress other people by--

Who's telling this story, me or you? I'm trying to explain that one way or another, whether it was intended or you backed into it, you've tapped into something old, something important! Don't you have anything to say about that?

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BAD CONNECTIONS

Peter... all I'm saying is that you have to pay attention to what's been happening to you lately. If you try to deny what's going on, you just make yourself vulnerable to whatever comes at you next from the spider side of you.

You're tying one arm behind your back.

Look, Ezekiel, I'm not denying that there's been a lot of weirdness in my life lately. But I'm just not there yet, I don't believe yet. I'm hardwired a certain way, I can't change that just because you say I should.

I know...

I'm just trying to help, that's all. I've been on a parallel road to yours for a long time, and I have the advantage of being able to see down the road a bit to what's coming.

I'm trying to straighten out some of the curves coming your way.

Such as?

The important things always come in threes. Mother, father, child. Childhood, adulthood, old age.

Life, death, and New Jersey.

Peter--

Sorry.

So far you've had two major hits from the spider side. Morlun, and now Shathra. Consider them the appetizers. There's one more coming, and it's going to be huge.

When, where, and what form it'll take, I don't know. I only know that you have to be careful, and when the time comes... open-minded.

There's more we could catch up on, but now isn't the time. I've been doing some interesting things lately, Peter. I've been trying to do some good.

Trying to follow your example.

But you should get back to New York. Your presence will be missed by now.

I know... with everything that happened, I have to make sure MJ's okay. She sounded pretty shook up.

I've had my company arrange for your transportation. Your tickets are waiting inside, along with a passport we... created on your behalf.

Cool.

But I want you to understand that this isn't over yet.

You're the only other person in the world who knows what it's like to be me, to do what I can do. There are a lot of questions I want... need... to ask you.

You will. Soon, when the time is right. Take care, Peter.

You too, Ezekiel.

And by the way... I'm glad to see you're alive. Really glad. You're a good guy.

I hope so, Peter. I truly hope you're right.

And I hope you think so still, when you find out the truth about me.

Hey, driver? Stop the car for a second.

Yes, sir.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we've just been given the go-ahead from the tower to start taxiing toward the runway--"

Just... didn't feel right, y'know? It just... didn't feel right.

--so we ask that you turn off any cell phones or electronic equipment in preparation for takeoff.

So, you live in New York?

Not for a while.

Going back to see friends? Family?

My husband.

That's great.

'Course, that doesn't mean you have to be in a big rush to get there, right? I know this place we could go for a drink--

MEN'S FIT

And let me guess, it's right next door to a hotel.

Inside the hotel, actually. And from your look I'll bet you've been there a few times yourself.

Hey!

Is there a problem?

Turbulence.

But we're still on the ground.

Are we? Imagine that. Still on the ground. Will wonders never cease?

"I don't suppose there's any food on this flight?"

GHANA EAGLE AIR

Yes, sir, first class has a full meal on the New York flight.

Good. That's great. I don't get to fly first very often and...

Sir?

Question...

...any chance I could trade that one-way first class ticket to New York for a coach ticket to Los Angeles, with an open-date return flight to New York?

Just a moment, let me check.

Yes, I can make the switch, and we have a flight to Los Angeles leaving in two hours. Shall I change the reservation for you?

I...

Yeah. Because some things need to be said face-to-face.

Let's do it.

"You sure you know what you're doing?"

Because this ain't exactly the most beautiful part of town, y'know.

Don't worry, I've faced worse in my life. A lot worse. And it's time I faced the rest of them.

Oh, hi, are you looking for Pete?

Umm..yes, I thought this was his--

Oh, it is.

I think he may be out, though. He's always going and coming, all hours of the night. He must have a great social life --

"-- always on the go, in demand, you know how it is."

Yes, I suppose I do.

Well, if I see him, I'll tell him you were asking about him.

"If you ever need anything, my place is at your disposal, MJ. Mi casa, su casa."

I'm reasonably sure he must have said something like that at one time or another.

I think I'm going to throw up.

If you're going to throw up, dear, make sure you throw up into the bag, or--

No, dear, not *that* bag--

Oh, I see you decided to eat those peanuts after all...

There's no place like home... there's no place like home... there's no place like home...

"Yep... no place like home..."

...that's what I always say, except... when I'm not saying it...

=giggle=

You know that joke about the actress who was so dumb she schtuped the writer? You know why that doesn't make sense?

Huh-uh.

'Cause in Hollywood, *everybody* schtups the writer.

=giggle=

'Morning, Harold.

Good morning, sir, another late night premiere, I see.

Yeah, yeah, whatever... c'mon my dear, have I got a part for you...

Excuse me, does a Mary Jane Watson live here?

I'm afraid we don't confirm our guests.

Well, assuming she does live here, can you tell her Peter's here?

And who would you be, sir?

Her husband.

Well, then, you'd be the fourth this week to come here saying he's her husband. Ever since this place appeared on the star maps, the world's gone quite mad around here...

I'm just saying--

Sorry, sir, nothing I can do. Now please move along before I have to call Security.

"Perhaps you could call her yourself, *if* you actually have the number."

If I actually have the number... *if*. How about I shove that *if* right up your--

CLICK

*Hi, this is MJ. I'm leaving my answering machine on announce only, because I'm going to be with someone very special for the next few days and there's nothing **anyone** can say important enough to interrupt that.*

Could my timing possibly be any worse? Unless she just put up that message to throw off the stalkers, the guys who think they're her husband.

Guys like me.

PAC BELL

Unless --!

Haven't checked messages in days, maybe there's--

555

PAC BELL

We're sorry, but the number you have dialed is no longer in service.

What?!

"Hello, New York Bell."

New York Telephone

URGENT

YOUR NYT STATEMENT

"Are you people out of your minds?"

"--paid my bill it's right there in your records!"

"Yes, sir, I see that on my screen, but the data has not been moved from our accounting files to our action files which is necessary before we can reconnect your phone service."

"This is--"

"I can assure you there's no need to use that kind of language, sir."

"And furthermore --"

"There's *no* reason to bring my entire family into this discussion, sir --"

"Listen --"

"-- and I've never even *seen* a camel in person. Your service will be reconnected in 48 hours, and if you have any problems with that, I suggest that from now on you be prompt with your payments."

"Click!"

SLAM

SLAM SLAM SLAM SLAM

555

Okay, so if the front door's closed, and the lines are down, there's always the back door --

-- or, since this is Hollywood... the Rear Window.

You don't say anything, I won't say anything.

Deal.

Just keep going, Peter... it's nothing that gouging out your eyes and washing them in sulfuric acid won't fix...

MJ? You here? It's Peter. Can I come in?

Well, technically, I suppose the question is can I stay in or--

MJ?

The first thing I smell is her perfume. Perfume and talcum powder and make-up and recently dry-cleaned clothing.

The smell of shaving cream and aftershave and roll-on.

I remember the day she bought that dress, with the first check she got from a full-page cover spread.

He wore that the night he took me to dinner at the Four Seasons, and found out he'd left his wallet at home and had to leave the jacket as collateral. He never wore it again, because it was embarrassing, but it was so cute and so funny.

I wonder.

I want to know.

But I'll never ask her. Never. Not if I get her back.

There haven't been any more reports about that...whatever she, it was, so Peter must have taken care of the situation. He'll be back. And I'll be here, waiting for him.

I want to see the look on his face when he finds me. See him smile again.

She always had such a great smile.

ATRIUM

WOMEN

MOVIES

IF HE CAN'T THEN...

"BY THREE"

STARRING

RSVP

20TH FOX

FORMAL ATTIRE REQUESTED

SET PASS

ARE CORDIALLY

SCREENING

"A DO

RSVP

She has her own life now. A life that has nothing to do with me. The life she always wanted. She's moved on. She's happy now.

MARY JANE

What the hell are you doing here, Peter?

What the hell am I doing here? After everything I've put him through, would he even want me? I'm a fool.

But I'll wait. Just a little longer.

Just... a little longer.

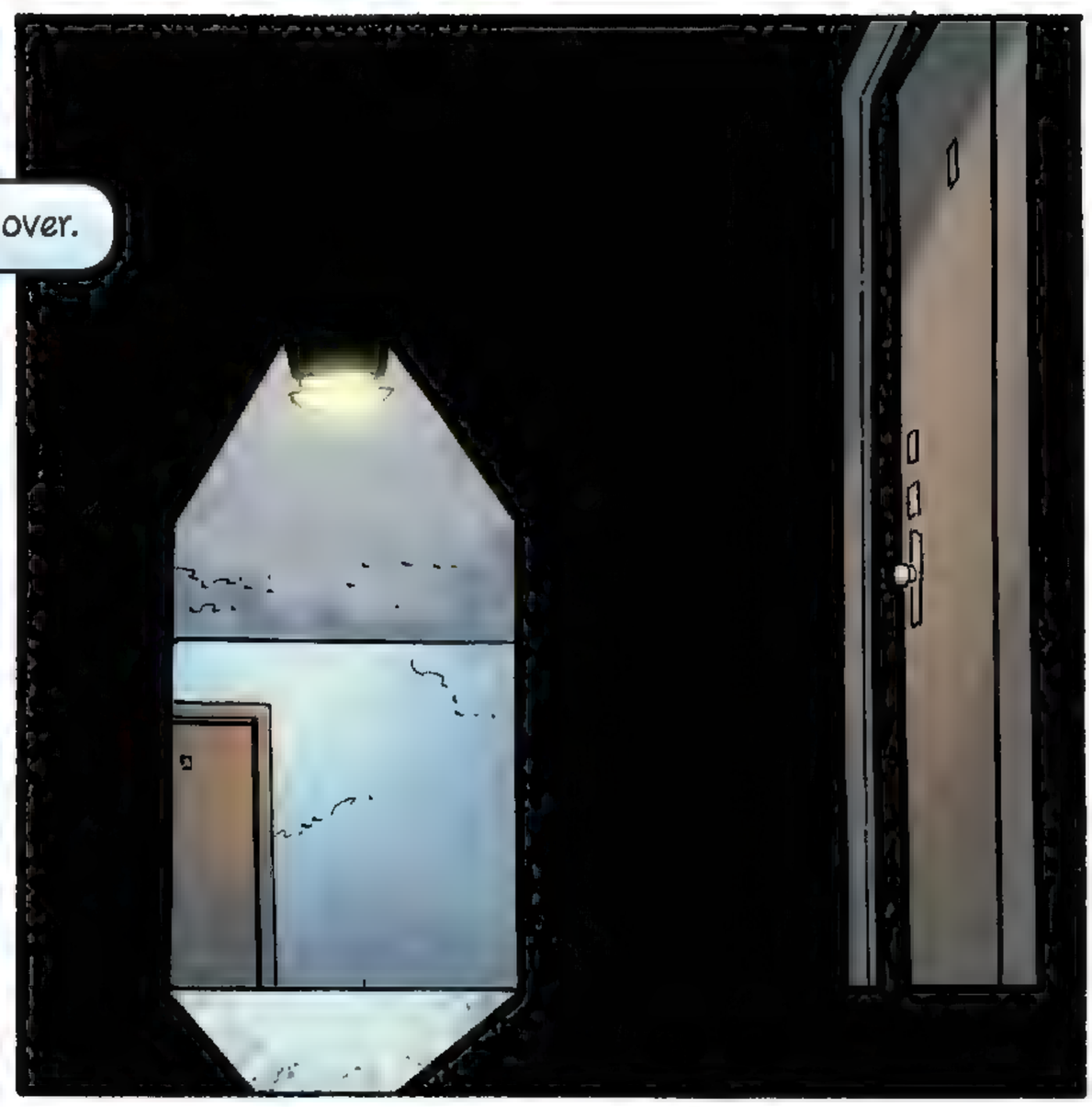
This was a mistake. I should never have come.

Let it go.

Let it go.

It's over.

Move on.


It's over.

--to welcome you aboard flight 739 nonstop to New York. Before we take off you should familiarize yourself with the emergency instructions--

--and we should be arriving in Los Angeles shortly ahead of schedule. We've got one stop-over in Denver, where we're expecting some weather, but we're assured it won't be any trouble--

Goodbye, MJ.

Bye, Peter.

--hitting some stormy weather, so we ask that you return to your seats and fasten your seat belts.

KA THOOOM

KRAAAAKK

BOOOOOM

Jeez --! Did it hit us?!

It grazed us...I'm getting irregular readings on the electrical system.

Damn... are we air-worthy?

I think so, but I'm not sure. I wouldn't want to risk it, though, not on a flight this long.

Nuts...

This is your captain speaking... you probably just saw that hammer of a lightning bolt that skinned the surface. We don't believe it caused any damage--

-- but to be on the safe side we're going to put down for an inspection of the electrical system. We apologize for the inconvenience, but airline safety regulations require that we have full confidence in our systems before continuing.

Nuts. Just nuts. What else can go wrong?

So if you'll buckle up, we'll be on the ground in Denver in just a few minutes.

-- and I want a fruity-jooty freeze, a hamburger...no, a cheeseburger, and some fries...you got the curly fries?

BURGER-N-

We're out of curly fries. But we got home fries and natural fries.

...sigh...

Okay, so I'll have a cheeseburger, a fruity-jooty freeze, natural fries, and a cookie.

You take Canadian money?

No.

Aw, man, c'mon...

--and I just think Marilyn Manson is *so* wicked!

So wicked!

Wicked?

Wicked!

Excuse me, can I borrow your fork?

I want to stick it in my eye.

Why?

Wicked!

--announcing the re-boarding of flight 739 to New York. We will be pre-boarding first class passengers at gate 29--

About time...

'Scuse me... coming through... nice dress....

26

THUD

THUD

MJ--
Pete? What're you--
Can we talk?
I was... I have a flight--
I don't care.
Me either.
So let's talk, Peter. Let's talk...

MARVEL

PG 50

STRACZYNSKI

ROMITA JR

HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

I went to see you in Los Angeles --

I went to see you in New York --

I was gone.

So was I.

Typical Parker luck.

DOOMED AFFAIRS

I wanted to see you because I saw what you went through with that... thing, Shathra --

I know, and I'm sorry she put you through that...when she said we'd been...involved... there was such pain in your voice --

I know. There shouldn't have been. But there was.

Which is exactly the problem, Peter. And the reason I was vulnerable.

When you live with somebody who has a double life, no matter how much you trust him, there's the thought of, "What else is he keeping to himself?"

That's the chink in my armor, Peter. That's how she got through. It was only a second, but it brought all the problems home to me.

At some level, we're all insecure. We all think, "Maybe the other person has gotten bored with me."

You think, maybe he's looking at other women, maybe my conversations don't interest him anymore, maybe --

Peter?

Peter, are you *listening* to me?

...oh, crap....

If you'll come this way, sir, we can get you to the --

This is most inconvenient. I had requested a private gate where I could meet with the delegation from Geneva on our way to the conference --

All I know is what I was told, some kind of problem with the gate.

Typical shoddy American workmanship. Such incompetence would not be permitted in the Latveria of --

--DOCTOR DOOM.

How do you do that?

Do what?

Speak in all capitals like that?

Silence, minion.

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This accursed conference would not even be ***necessary*** if your country's industries were not spewing forth enough particulate matter to cause the planet to warm, melting your own Glacier Park, breaking off whole portions of the Arctic, and causing climate changes in my home country.

Problems that can only be addressed by working in concert with other countries. It is an affront to our dignity. Latveria works alone. Latveria needs no one else to form our destiny.

Yeah, it's just a hard-knock life with you, isn't it?

So *that's* Doctor Doom, I --

MJ, something's wrong... my spider-sense is going nuts --

Well, yeah...I mean, Doctor Doom, walking right by --

No... it's something else, it's --

EEEEEEEEE!

TAXI

EXIT

BAGGA

Doom!

Free Latveria!

Down with tyrants! Free Latveria!

FREE LATVERIA!

Down!

uNNNGH...

Are you all right?

I... I think so, are we --

Okay... this is bad.

Are you okay? Mister? I --

-- I....

Peter? What are you doing?

Long story, don't ask, long story, don't ask... just stay there.

Have to move fast....

...you...

...listen closely --

Don't try to move, it's --

No... no time... Avengers had me on to keep an eye on things... afraid there might be trouble --

It's going to be okay, it's over.

No... it's just starting.

BOOM

Uh, oh...

DIA

Doom! We have come for you! If the blast was not enough, we will kill you with our bare hands!

Millions of dollars and years of planning, all for this supreme moment.

Doom's unconscious, nothing he can do to stop this.

Die, tyrant!

Sorry --

-- not today!

WHAMMM

Close quarters. Civilians. A bad combination.

He's after Doom and he doesn't care who gets hurt along the way. But I do.

Which puts me at a tactical disadvantage.

Why do you protect him? He is a murderer. A tyrant. We demand justice!

You don't get justice like this. There are laws--

He ignores the laws! He does as he wishes to whoever he wishes!

Which makes him, and what you're doing right now, different... how?

Look, I'm no fan of the guy. But I'm not going to just stand by and let you kill him. I stood by once before, and regretted it ever since. And I never make the same mistake twice.

Correction...

...you will not *live* to make the same mistake twice!

Cyber-enhanced grip...almost as strong as I am... have to get clear before --

WHIRRRRR

No --

Can't get clear --

Target locked.

SPANG

What --

Mind if I cut in?

Not at all.

SLAMM

Looks like he's down for the count.

There's one down, yes.

But if my suspicion is correct, that's a distress signal. Which means we may have more company very soon.

BEEP BEEP BEEP -- BEEP BEEP BEEP

Any chance we can get these people out of here?

I... had access to a security radio. They're digging through on the other side, but it'll take time. And we can't take them out through the hole in the ceiling because some of these people are too injured to be moved.

We just have to stay here until they can dig us out and make sure no one gets hurt.

Are you all right, ma'am?

Are you, urm, okay... lady?

Fine...

Do you mind if I --

It's a free carpet.

And another thing... you never introduce me to your friends.

Oy...

No, seriously. Over the years, there are times I've felt more like your mistress than your wife because when you're... on the job... you have to deny knowing me. You'll walk right past me. You won't even meet my eyes.

Look at my mask, MJ, I don't *have* any eyes --

Don't quibble. You know what I'm talking about.

I know you do it to protect me. I know it's necessary. But there's what the mind knows and what the heart feels.

I've never wanted or expected you to set me above what you do. I know why you do it, and I'd never try to interfere with that.

What I haven't been able to work out is where I fit in with it all. I want to work it out, Peter, I really do. I just...don't know how.

You fit in because I love you. Isn't that enough?

No. No, it's not. Too often, "I love you" is something people say when they want to get something out of you, or control you. It doesn't HAVE to mean that, but --

But MJ, what's left?

That's what I'm --

Nuts.

What?

We've got company.

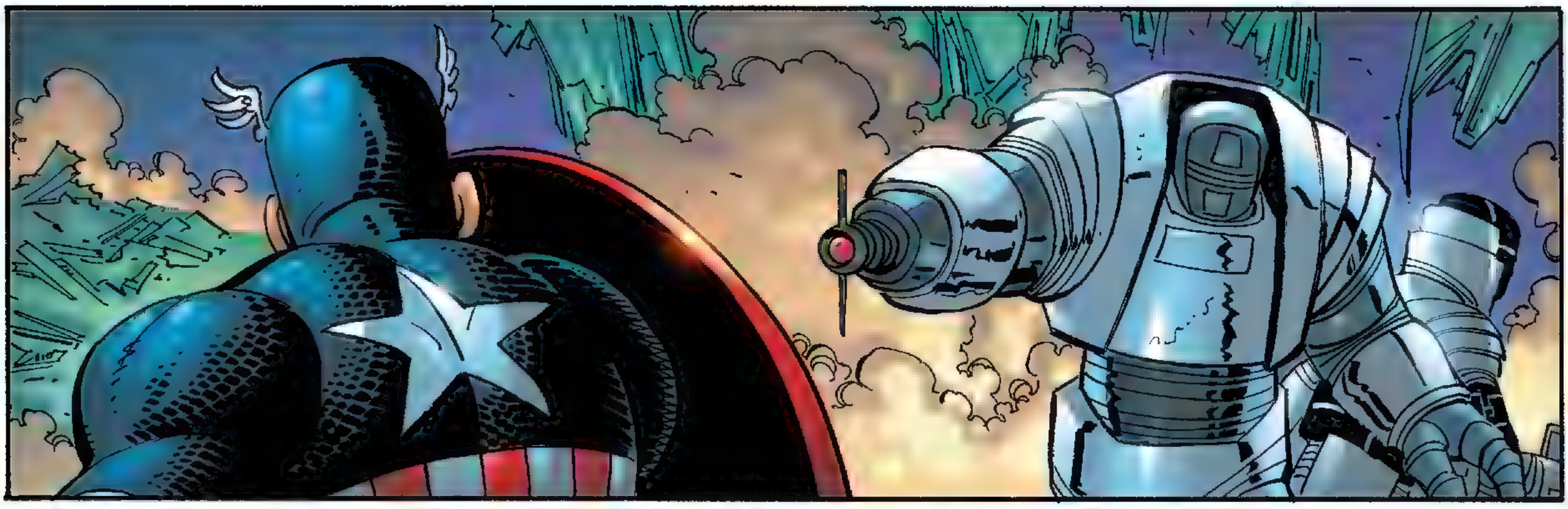
Die, tyrant! Free Latveria!

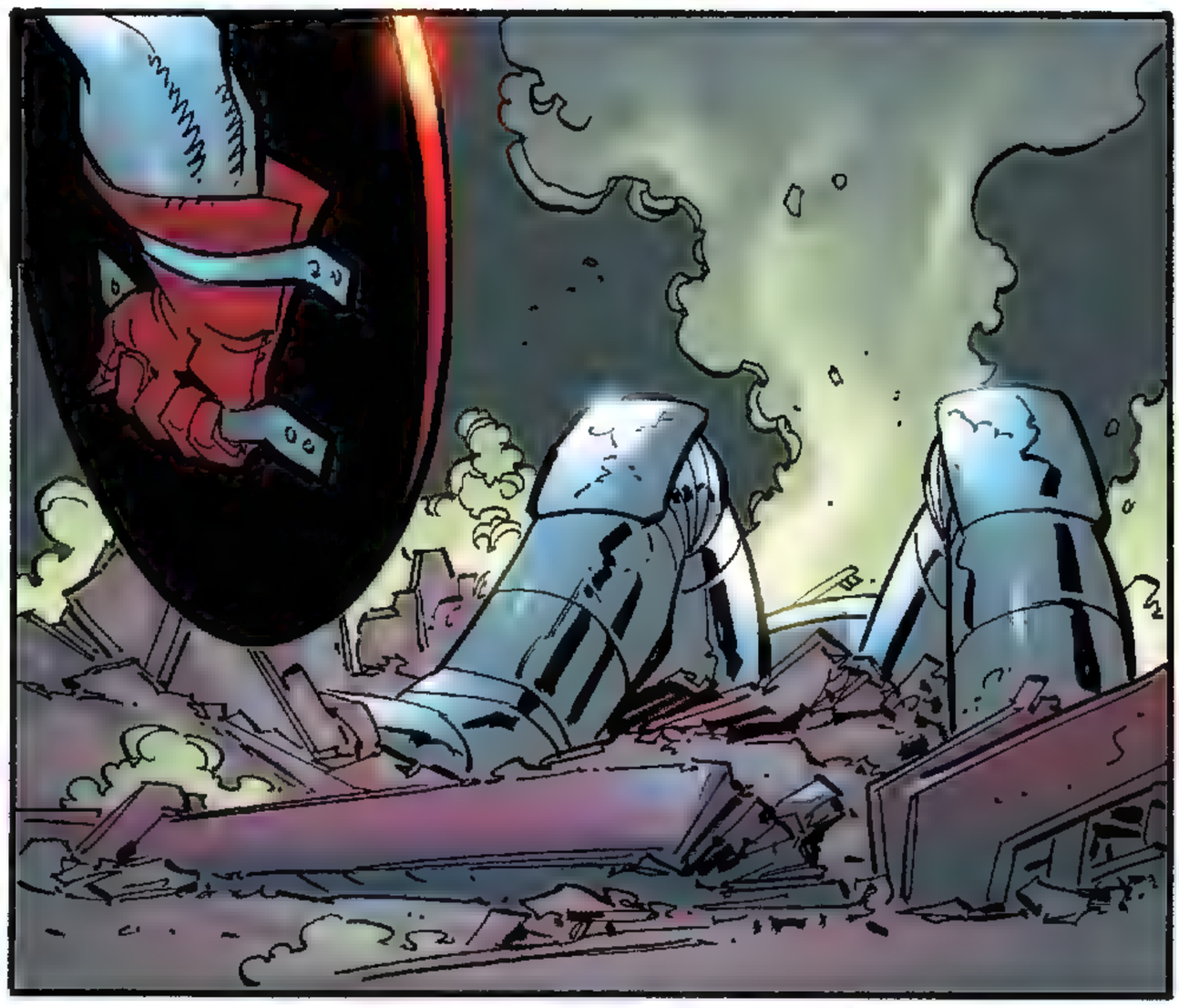
...sigh.

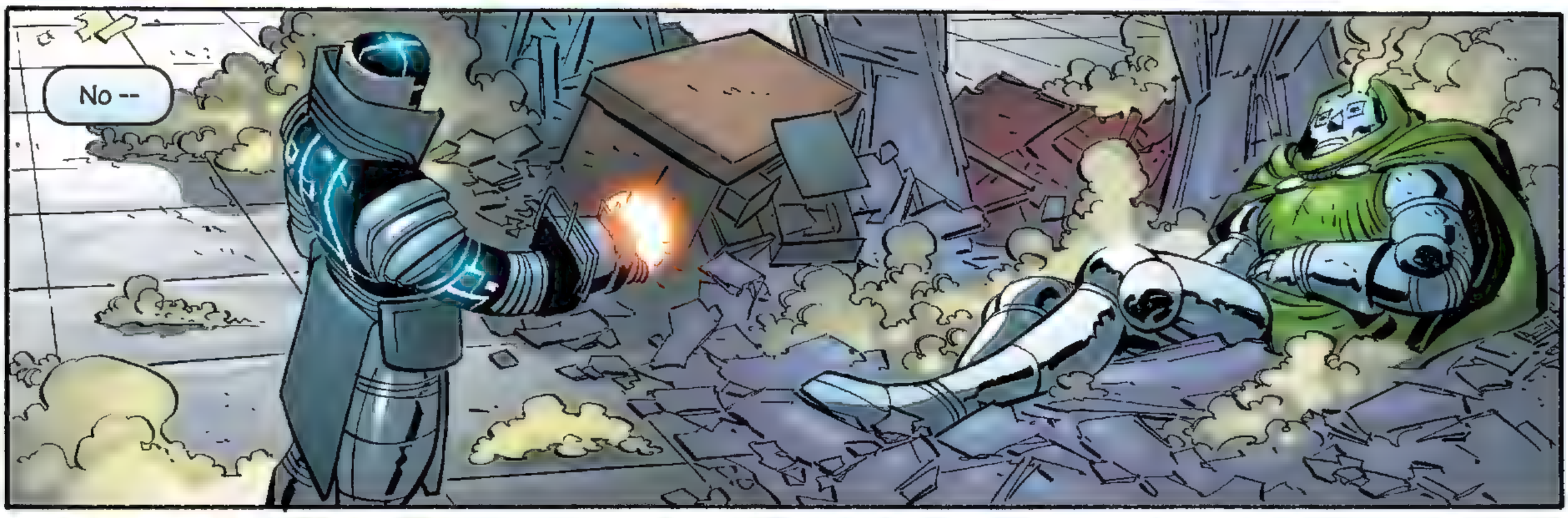
You'd think they could at least get some fresh material once in a while.

Oh, well... as Ben likes to say --

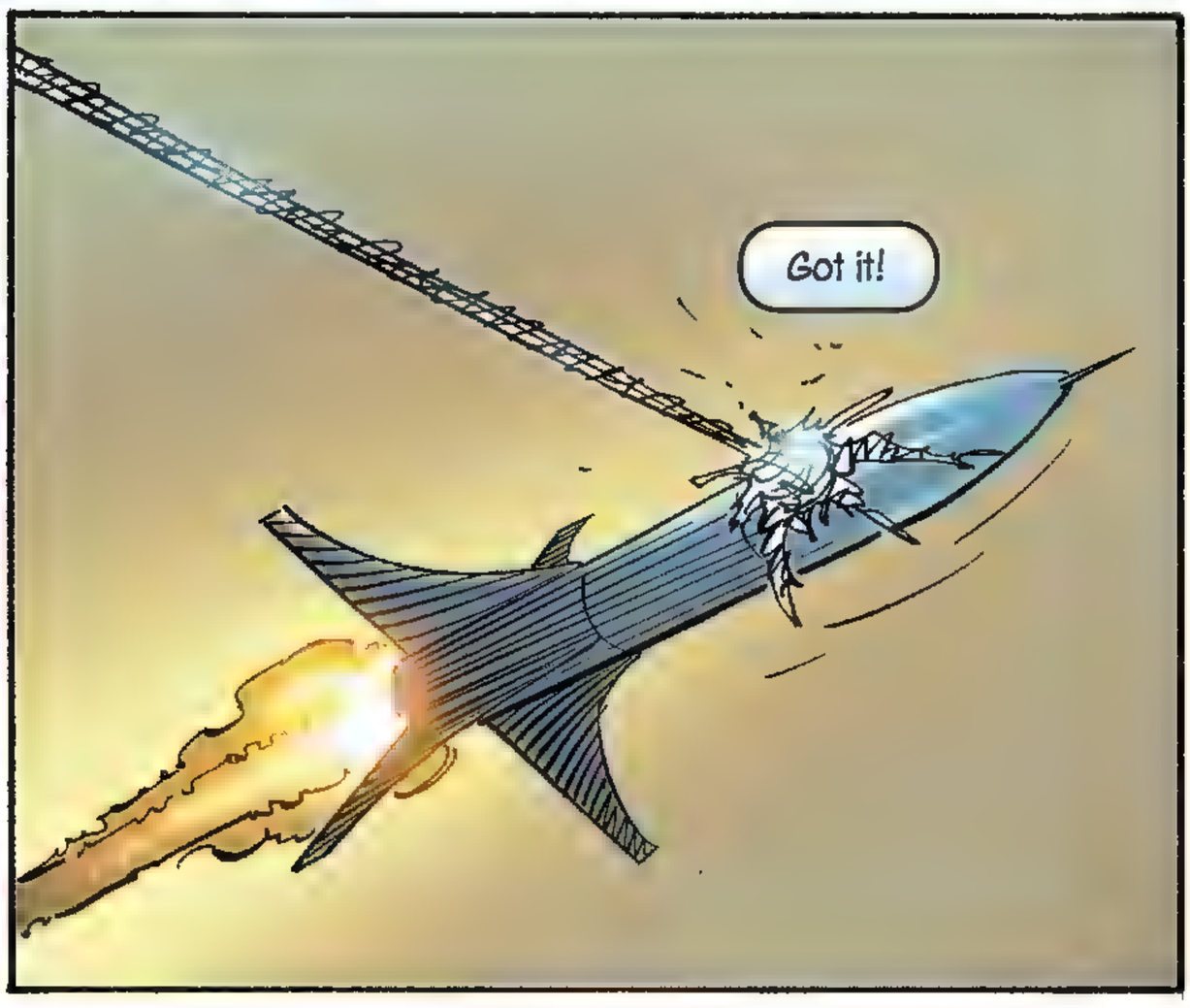
-- IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!






No --

Got to stop it --


Got it!

Just hope it lands somewhere safe --

Die, tyr --

-- ook --

AAAAAAAHHHHH!

THWP

KKKOOOM

Any of them getting up?
No.
Good.
Okay... where were we?
This is *so* ridiculous. I can't believe we're having this conversation here. I was thinking dinner, flowers, wine --
I'm pretty sure I saw some peanuts over there --
Okay. Sorry. I'm just trying to --
You know how I --
Damn it, MJ....
You just don't understand, y'know? I mean, end of the day, you really don't understand.
Understand what? What is it that I don't understand? We've come all this way... *talk* to me, because this... this may be our last chance.
I --
No. I don't want to talk to the spider.
I want to talk to Peter.
Yes, ma'am, well, I think you'll be safe from debris over here.
...sigh....
That's right, no need to be alarmed, everything's under control.

Meshugge.

What I want to say --

What I want to say... is you're right. It's not enough to say that I love you. You can love more than one person. You can love in more than one way. You can love somebody as a friend.

It's not just that I love you, MJ.

I need you.

You don't need me, Peter. You've got all these powers, you were out there doing all these things --

You're wrong.

I can do "all these things" because you believe in me. Because you give me the strength and the will to get them done. Everything's easier when you're there and harder when you're not. Without you, nothing works the way it should. But when I know you're there, in my life, I feel like I can do anything, MJ.

Anything.

MJ...?

When I left... when I went away....

...it was because I was so far outside your life, I could never *do* anything to help, I could never be a part of what you do, and you could do it so well, that I just....

I didn't think you needed me, Peter. That's all I wanted to know, that's all I needed to hear, that you needed me, that you...

I was so afraid you didn't need me anymore.

I do. I love you, MJ.

I need you.

I'm nothing without you.

Come home.

Come home to me.

Okay... okay, Peter, I'll --

Did the ground just move?

It always does.

That's it... a little more... okay, you're clear.

Looks like everything's under control.

Mostly. We had one distraction while you were --

Doctor Doom is not a distraction.

He came to a few minutes ago.

It is my understanding that you took it upon yourself to prevent harm from befalling me.

You mean did I save your sorry butt? Yeah. I did. I'm not happy about it, but I did it.

Nonetheless, I owe you a debt, and --

Keep it. The reason those guys came after you, the reason all this happened, is that you *are* a tyrant, and I can't wait for the day when I can turn on CNN and watch you trying to defend yourself in front of a jury in The Hague.

So take your thanks and stick it.

It is well that I owe you a debt, because I would kill anyone else who spoke those words to me.

Yeah, yeah, tell it to the Marines.

Sir...?

We're ready to escort you to another part of the airport where you can continue your journey.

Good. It is well that I was on my way.

Your countrymen have much to learn about manners.

Well, sir, you know, we can't all be Canadians...

Well, at least that's over. Anything else?

No, I... guess not.

BAGGAG

AX

Well, there is one thing...

This is... a friend of mine. A very, very dear friend of mine. MJ, Captain America. Captain America, MJ.

Hello.

Hi. I mean, hello. Sir. I mean --

It's all right.

A word to the wise from someone who's been down this road for a while.

The mask is supposed to hide your face. Don't let it hide your heart.

Who was that masked man?

I'm *so* going to hurt you.

I need to find a place to change. Then we're going for a long walk while your travel agent books you on a flight to New York...

"...I don't want anything to get in the way of us again."

Please empty your pockets of anything metal.

CLINK CLINK

Oh, my...

Now, tell the truth, isn't this better than hanging around with the Amazing Lobster-Boy?

That's the Amazing Lobster-*Man.*

Not in those tights.

God, but I missed you, MJ. I missed you so much.

This won't be easy, you know that.

I know. But it's worth it.

You're worth it.

You're worth it and I love you and I need you. Welcome back, MJ.

Welcome back.

WHICH CAME FIRST, THE RADIATION OR THE POWERS?

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